

Spacebridges

An Interview With Joseph Golden
By Robert Gilman



Linking the world together with communications technology

In this decade a new form of communication has developed. It is the spacebridge, the name given to an exchange conducted over television between participants in two or more countries linked by space satellite. Participants generally see each other on very large screens. More than 10 spacebridges have been created to date between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, including the US Festival, the Live Aid concert (in which many countries participated), the Phil Donahue show, and the Beyond War international peace awards. These events have been widely broadcast in the Soviet Union; only the Donahue show and Live Aid were shown on national network television in the United States.

Joseph Goldin, a freelance writer and visionary, is one of the moving forces in the Soviet Union in the evolution of spacebridges. While not a part of the official Soviet system, he has developed a remarkable working relationships with many influential people in the government and has been able to bring about official interest, support, and cooperation in the development of spacebridge technology and content. In the Soviet Union it is most unusual for someone working autonomously, as Joseph does, to be able to generate this kind of support for projects. Yet now that he has shown it can be done, there is hope that others will follow in his footsteps.

As impressive as Joseph's achievements are, his vision is even grander. It gives us a glimpse of what could be achieved for the whole planet if the people of the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. could really work together.

Robert: Your work in helping to create spacebridges between the Soviet Union and the United States thus far is unique. Can you tell us about the possibilities you see for this medium?

Joseph: It is like your *IN CONTEXT* issue on "The New Story" [#12]. In order to bring about the kind of transformation the world needs, we need to see ourselves in a different way, to create a new story. My vision of how to create that story is by enabling large groups of people to interact spon-

taneously and directly via huge screens like the ones that were used for Live Aid. I always wanted to make this story a reality.

Robert: And how is that progressing?

Joseph: I was totally dependent on technology. Technology was reduced to a huge electronic screen which cost about 3 million rubles. Without this screen, all these talks would be just words. Spacebridges for the last four years have been reduced to an exchange of a selected few, with pre-written scripts, videotaped, edited, and shown later, without any chance for spontaneity. This is not my story – it's somebody else's story. Misconceptions between the Soviet Union and the United States can only be dispelled by direct and spontaneous contact between large groups of Russians and Americans. Until the communication is spontaneous and between large groups, it's not my story. Now for the first time, we are facing such a possibility.

Robert: You have the screen now. Could you describe it?

Joseph: It was based on a screen created in 1971 by an engineer here which consisted of 100,000 bulbs controlled by computer to transmit images from TV to videotapes. It was the largest screen in the world at that time. It was produced but was not being used. Four years later, Mitsubishi reproduced the screen using electronic video tubes in place of the bulbs. They made a color video screen. When we created the first spacebridge with the US Festival in California, we discovered these screens being used there. When we saw ourselves pictured on the screen there, it was something – it was transformative.

A few days later, I wrote to that Russian engineer and asked him how we could create such a screen in this country. He invited some engineers to work with Japanese engineers to find out how to make it with tubes instead of bulbs. So I invited him and Academician Velikhov to the second spacebridge, to reinforce this work.

When Academician Velikhov compared nuclear weaponry with cancer and this engineer experienced the emotional impact of seeing California and the Soviet Union together, there were tears

in his eyes, and he was very excited about the work. He made an unusual effort and started to move further and further, and eventually they were able to create the new screen. They dismantled the bulb screen and replaced it with the new tube screen last August for the youth festival. So I started to use this screen to play my games, because it was natural to invite people on the street to gather around the screen and share with people in the outside world. But it wasn't easy, because the city council was not yet prepared to do this; they had no experience with doing live exchanges.

But on April 12, the 25th anniversary of Yuri Gagarin's flight to outer space, they agreed to gather passersby to talk to two Soviet cosmonauts moving from Australia to Japan in a satellite. They talked to us live, answering questions. When someone pushed me forward to speak, I promised the cosmonauts that they would be invited to the global town meeting on New Year's Eve, when two billion people would be collected together. One of the cosmonauts said "Two billion!" He was so surprised, and I was surprised that he didn't know. I guess he never heard of the Live Aid concert.

Now we should talk about why it's so important to make these efforts. If huge numbers of people share spontaneously and simultaneously their presence on the earth together, and some sort of a critical mass is achieved, and very skillful people help them get a feeling of being together, it will destroy many artificial walls between people.

Robert: *The spontaneity that can only occur when you have live activity allows the movement to a new experience. As long as it's pre-recorded and edited, the editor prevents the new from happening, unless you have a special editor.*

Joseph: Or unless you're playing a different game. I'm not sure this is the only form we should have, but it's a good beginning, a quantum leap. After that, we can try to understand the nature of this explosion, this transformation, and then marshal all our intellectual resources and make room for many special programs and publications, and so on. But the first thing should be to experience it together.

Robert: *I have observed (primarily in the United States, but also in other countries that I've visited) that there are a great many individuals who feel that they have been going through changes of consciousness in their personal lives, but they do not yet have many people that they feel they can share it with. So it seems to me that we're very ripe for a public celebration of our private changes.*

Joseph: I think what you just said is very important. They have experienced it, but they don't know how to express themselves about it.

Robert: *Culture is more than just adding up*

individuals; cultural reality, as opposed to personal realities, requires shared experience.

Joseph: Yes. Culture has developed unusual means of communication, and probably new channels should be added to share these discoveries that people have made.

Robert: *What occurs to me as you describe this is that some people think that one of the most important results of the program to put people into space was the photograph of the whole earth and the impact that has had on everyone on the planet. The kind of shared simultaneous experience that you're working to create feels to me like the next photograph of the whole earth, only this is the photograph of humanity.*

Joseph: Yes. This is a social invention. The combination of a huge video screen with a satellite is as important as the combination of a warhead and a rocket. The warhead and the rocket gives you two billion victims; the screen and the satellite gives you two billion viewers. We should share the simplest, most archetypal things first, and then we need to develop a whole new culture to enable people to see each other. "To see or to die", as Teilhard de Chardin says.

Robert: *I would say that what you are talking about is providing the campfire around which the new storytelling can proceed. We talk about stories as if they were just fiction, but the powerful stories are the ones that fit the facts as best we know them, and that's where the scholars come in. But it needs the storytelling qualities, too. We need to move the storytelling into the multimedia, but it must be genuine, spontaneous, open and public.*

Joseph: What we need now is a new medium of communication that enables self-actualized individuals to share their knowledge of hidden human reserves with as many people as possible.

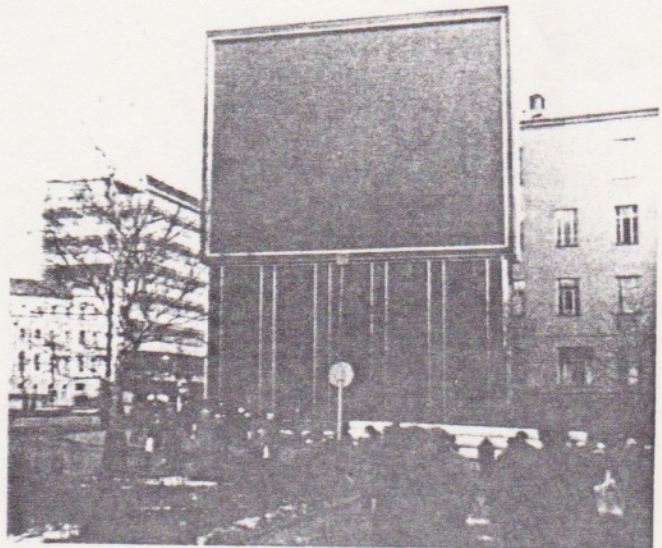


Photo by Robert Gilman

"Secrets" once held by only an enlightened few will gradually pass into the domain of world public experience.

Gigantic video screens used for bilateral communication between thousands of people could become a traditional element of the environment in every town and village, just like the public squares of the Greek city-states or the Forums of the Roman Empire. The new feeling of "distant proximity" experienced by millions of people all over the world would create a new self-awareness and inevitably lead to a radical transformation in the way we deal with global problems.

Imagine a small city connected to the network of spacebridge terminals. This would enable us to create a "city-as-a-classroom" model for lifelong education. The entire population of the city could participate in multi-lateral communication with other cities around the world. Immediately the temptation would emerge for truly creative scientists and artists to join forces to help ordinary inhabitants to be transformed into citizens of the world. If a hundred Americans were to play the roles of Russians in order to master the Russian

language in three weeks (or vice versa), it would also be a chance to evaluate a nation's perceptions and misperceptions of itself and other nations. Or if several thousand people were involved in a living theatrical event staged by progressive directors, designers, and actors, it would not be merely routine entertainment, but the initiation of ordinary people into the zone of expanded awareness.

Hidden human reserves can be manifested in almost any sphere of human activity: accelerated methods of learning; bodily transformation through sports; meditative disciplines; spiritual healing; increased powers of intuition and extra-sensory perception; general phenomena of "peak experience" as a means of cultivating universal thinking, and so on. But the potential of hidden human reserves has never been taken into account by strategic planners, global modelers, or ordinary voters. Something should be done to break the vicious circle of fear and mistrust so that we may finally reorient technology from weaponry to "livingry" and thus transform the entire paradigm of modern culture. □

Resources

These organizations and publications supplement those mentioned in previous articles. For a complete list of organizations involved in citizen diplomacy, refer to the first entry below:

INSTITUTE FOR SOVIET-AMERICAN RELATIONS, 1608 New Hampshire NW, Washington DC 20009, 202/387-3034. ISAR has a good handle on the extent of Soviet-American contact by private and public organizations and individuals. Of particular value is the ISAR handbook *Organizations Involved In Soviet-American Relations*. This is published yearly (last issued in June 1986) and contains a listing of private and governmental organizations (American and Soviet), information on all kinds of exchanges, and a section of information frequently requested by American citizens.

CITIZEN DIPLOMAT INC., Steven Kalishman, 408 W. University Ave. Suite 303, Gainesville, FL 32601, 904/376-0341. This organization publishes a regular news journal entitled *The Citizen Diplomat*. They also have other publications providing information on how to create various C.D. projects.

PEACE CHILD FOUNDATION, 3977 Chain Bridge Rd., Fairfax, VA 22030, 703/385-4494. The Peace Child Foundation organizes international touring companies of the musical "Peace Child" and provides information and assistance to individuals wishing to produce "Peace Child" in their local areas.

EARTHSTEWARDS NETWORK, 6330 Eagle Harbor Dr. NE, Bainbridge Island, WA 98110, 206/842-7986. Earthstewards sponsor frequent trips to the Soviet Union with special focuses. They have excellent contacts there which are being continually developed.

CENTER FOR U.S.-U.S.S.R INITIATIVES, 349 Liberty #2, San Francisco, CA 94114, 415/821-2558. This organization provides programs about Soviet people, history, and language and information about travel groups offering Soviet trips. Founded by Sharon Tennison, a pioneer in citizen diplomacy.

CITIZEN EXCHANGE COUNCIL, 18 E. 41st St., New York, NY 10017, 212/889-7960. CEC is recognized in both the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. as an important sponsor of exchanges. It involves a broad